

Wild Horse Herd Management Plan Update
Working Group Formation
5:30 – 7:30 pm
Dec. 14, 2015
Bowman Museum Annex

Welcome – Vernita Ediger, Natural Resources and Environment Program Administrator for Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council

Introducing the concept of the working group to “create a structured way to provide input into the Forest Service planning process.”

Objectives for the meeting:

- 1) Introduce Wild Horse Herd Management Update Project
- 2) Clarify the purpose of the working group
- 3) Why/What/What is beyond the scope
- 4) Together clarify next steps and timeline

Forest Service Overview – Stacey Forson, Ochoco Forest Supervisor

“We’re in a very unique position on the Ochoco. We have the only designated wild horse herd in the country entirely managed by the US Forest Service....National and regional eyes are on this process because we have a unique opportunity to be successful...”

What’s on the table: exploring opportunities for managing the size of the herd.

What’s not on the table: expanding size of the territory. Only Congress can do this and it wouldn’t solve any population issues.

We want to learn together and explore together how we can find solutions to a growing herd size.”

Vernita: “Goal for tonight is to focus on hearing and understanding other’s thoughts and opinions. It’s OK to disagree and to hold strong opinions. For tonight, please listen with an ear of understanding and really seek to understand where other people are coming from.”

Questions for tonight: What do others value? What are others concerned about? What can I learn from others in the room?

30-second introductions from everyone in the room:

- Your name
- Your organization
- Why you are here
- What does success look like to you in this process?

Vernita: There are a lot of voices and perspectives in the room, but I encourage you to think about who might be missing. In order to achieve credibility in this process, we need to make sure all the relevant voices are involved in this conversation.

Wild Horse Herd Management Plan Update
Slater Turner, Lookout Mountain District Ranger

“Thank you all for being here because the Forest Service cannot do this all by itself. We need your help.

There is a reason that we’re here now. We cannot continue to keep doing things as we have been. The herd management plan was developed in the early 1970s and lots of things have changed.”

Tory Kurtz, Rangeland Program Manager

Introduction to Herd Management Plan Revision and Working Committee

What we are doing:

- Update the herd management plan for the Big Summit Territory
- Completing an Environmental Impact Statement (about a three-year process)
- Participating in a working committee

Why:

- Existing plan from 1975 is out of date
- No tools for managing the horses currently
- BLM/FS agreement changed in 2013 (no longer have an agreement to use BLM corrals)
- Opportunities to engage the public and develop new ideas

Year One- Data Collection and Working Committee Initiation

- Forage rating and production, winter forage condition, etc.
- Partner with COIC to develop working group

Year Two- Develop a Proposed Action

- Analyze the data from horses and territory
- Learn and listen with committee
- Develop proposed action and scope proposal with the general public

Year Three- Complete EIS

- FS completes EIS
- Working committee assists with input from general public
- Committee discusses implementation opportunities for new management plan

Where are we at in Year One?

- FS has collected data for multiple resources
- Partnership and work with COIC has begun
- Identification of initial working committee members

Goals for Public Engagement

- Mutual education
- Listen to each other’s concerns and ideas
- Provide input for updating management plan
- Managing for “the greatest good”

Vernita Ediger – Overview of the Interview Process and Data

Diverse Views: Overview of the Interview Data

Method: Developed an interview guide, Conducted anonymous interviews, took notes and transcribed them

Data: 12 interviews (agency staff, horse riding groups, wild horse advocates, grazing permit holders, native plant restoration, elected officials, tribes)

What did I learn? Diverse array of values

- economic impacts, spiritual and aesthetic values, management complexity, resource impacts

What do stakeholders know about herd management? Not much

- Perception that management isn't happening
- A few stakeholders have historical knowledge
- Most with limited knowledge
- General call for more information and clarity

Biggest Management Challenges?

- Social contention: It's hard to discuss WH issues because of diverse values
- Population continues to grow
- Economics: Management costs are very high

What do we need to know more about?

- Policies and management: what are relevant policies? Current management activities? What has shifted in federal policies?
- Tools to limit growth or address numbers? What are the costs?
- Partnerships and solutions: Are there ways we can partner to find socially acceptable solutions to these problems?

Key Themes from Interviews?

Outside scope: Territory boundary (size, location); Multiple Use (uses within boundary); Legitimacy (feral vs wild; archaeological record; adaptability)

Inside Scope: Population; Economics; Humane Treatment; Partnering to Find Solutions

Summary: Common Concerns

- Population Size: size of herd in relation to resources available
- Well-being of horses: humane treatment
- Economics/Costs
- Socially acceptable solutions

Group exercise: Find two other people that you don't know and take turns sharing:

- Your name
- What didn't surprise you tonight
- What did surprise you tonight
- One thing you'd like to know more about

Small group discussion:

- Debate over scope of the process (territory boundary, effects of grazing and other uses within territory, etc.)
- Alleged administrative errors during the original drawing of territory boundaries
- Stacey Forson said administrative errors are important, but should be addressed outside this process (legislative change comes from Congress not the Forest Service); also the scope of the project was set in order to find achievable solutions so group does not spend all of its time debating things that cannot be addressed under this EIS; also, grazing and recreation are addressed through other processes, but an EIS for herd management would consider cumulative effects of things like recreation, grazing, resource impacts, etc.
- The issue of herd genetics was brought up several times as something that Forest Service usually does not talk about

Possible Topics for Future Meetings

- Current management
- Relevant policies
- Current conditions of WH territory
- Population (determining #s, fertility control and associated costs, methods for reducing herd size)

Group contributions:

- Managing for genetic viability
- Integrated resource management
- Invasive plants management inside territory
- Recreation
- What does a healthy herd look like/behave like?

Group is encouraged to send more topic ideas to Vernita and Tory

- also to think about which experts and other voices need to be brought into this process
- also to develop a schedule of meetings that works for this group.

Steve Gibson, Ochoco NF and Regional Rangeland and Wild Horse Program Manager, will likely speak at the next group meeting about key management policies and herd history relevant to this process.

Next steps: Vernita will send out a Doodle poll to the group to find a meeting date that works for everyone involved.

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